

# Sudden Oak Death found in Southern California

## Nurseries may have shipped infected plants across USA

By Elizabeth Weise  
USA TODAY

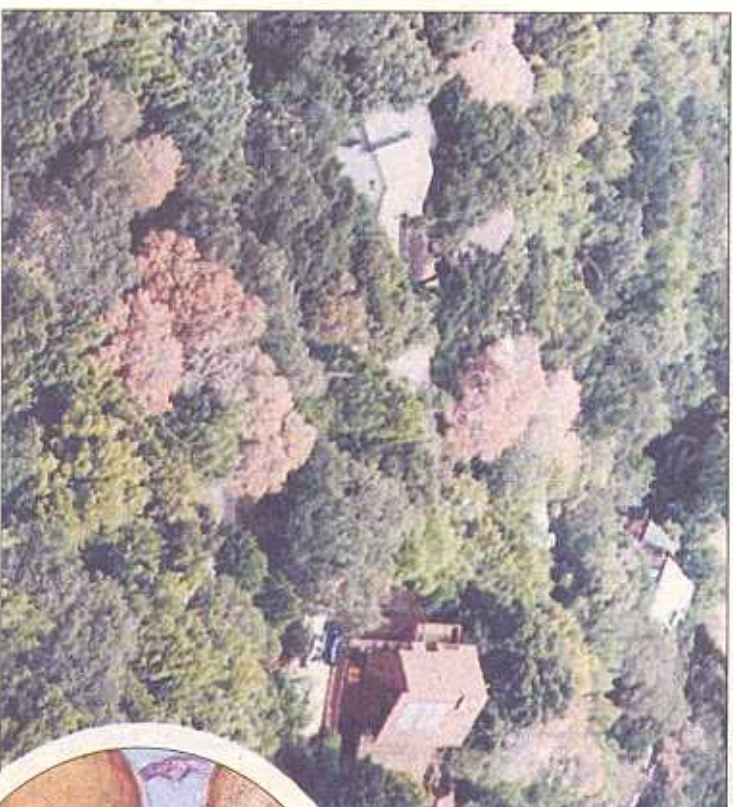
A shadow has fallen across the gardening world with the discovery this month of a pathogen called Sudden Oak Death in two Southern California nurseries.

Agriculture officials are particularly alarmed because one of the facilities involved is Monrovia, one of the nation's largest wholesale seller of plants, with six nurseries in California, Oregon, Ohio, North Carolina and Georgia.

Officials fear that plants infected with the disease that kills oak trees and several other plant species may have been shipped throughout the USA and Canada. On Monday, the Georgia Department of Agriculture banned shipments of nursery plants from California because of the outbreaks.

This is the first time the disease, which also was detected at Specialty Plants in San Diego County, has been found in Southern California. Infections have been found over the past two years at nurseries in Northern California, Washington state, Oregon and British Columbia.

Sudden Oak Death is caused by a



Above by Keith Palmer; California Oak Mortality Task Force; inset by David Rizzo, UC-Davis

**Mighty bad news:** Damage from Sudden Oak Death, a microscopic pathogen, can be seen in an aerial shot of canopies that have turned brown, and a ground-level shot, far right, taken at Napa Skyline Park.

fungus-like pathogen called *Phytophthora ramorum* (fit-TOF-thor-a-ra-MOR-um). It first appeared in Europe in 1993.

A slightly different variety was discovered in the USA in 1995. Since then it has killed tens of thousands of tan oak and oak trees in 12 central and northern coastal California counties. So far, 38 plant

species are known to be susceptible to the disease.

The disease was found March 9 on six varieties of camellia, a flowering evergreen shrub, at Monrovia's Los Angeles County facility.

On March 12, inspectors found the pathogen on camellias at Specialty Plants. The nursery buys camellias from Monrovia, says vice



By Keith Palmer/COMPTON



**Estimated no. of infected nurseries**

- California ..... 11
- Washington ..... 6
- Oregon ..... 3
- British Columbia ..... 1

**Most vulnerable**

- The southern Appalachian region, including the Smoky Blue Ridge and Piedmont mountains in parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia.
- Northern Louisiana uplands

president Chuck Michel.

Specialty Plants primarily sells bonsai and some flowering plants through mail order companies. It has quarantined its camellias.

Monrovia's Katie Bloome says the nursery, which grows more than 2,000 varieties of plants and dozens of varieties of camellias, is working with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to contain the infection.

California officials are tracking down plants that have been shipped over the past year by Monrovia and Specialty Plants. Nurseries that might have received infected plants will be notified.

The agriculture officials are not yet saying exactly where the plants were shipped.

The infection was found as part

of a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey for the disease. A nursery in Washington state was found to be infected, and officials traced that infection to Monrovia.

Scientists don't yet know where the disease comes from, though it is believed to have been introduced from another continent, possibly Asia.

Sudden Oak Death is now found only on the West Coast, but there are several other areas in the country that would be extremely favorable environments for the pathogen, says forest pathologist Matteo Garbelotto, one of the researchers to first identify the disease.

"The entire East Coast is potentially at risk, with the most likely areas being in Appalachia, Piedmont and the uplands in northern Louisiana," he says.

Those areas have cooler temperatures and a large number of potential wild plant hosts, including the mountain laurel and rhododendrons. "Through the nursery trade, the pathogen may move in to an area where it could get established in the wild," Garbelotto says.

"There is a treatment that can help prevent infection in trees exposed to the disease, but it can only be used on individual trees and must be periodically reapplied. 'It's a good tool for a homeowner with a healthy tree that's 100 yards from an infected tree,'" says Katie Palmieri of the California Oak Mortality Task Force.

"But it's not something that can be done on a mass level. It's not something you can do on a forest."